



TESTIMONY TO THE LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

The Little Hoover Commission has the tremendous task of providing insight and recommendations on how the State of California can effectively address the issue of youth crime and violence. Inevitably, part of this effort involves the evaluation of how funding and other resources are allocated to local communities to provide violence intervention and prevention services.

The California Endowment has initiated a funding process that could potentially be used as a model by the state and other agencies. This funding process, called CommunitiesFirst, is the flagship program of The Endowment's responsive grantmaking efforts. It is important to note that the focus of this program and The Endowment as a whole is to create new, more effective multicultural approaches to improve health and health care in California. Although youth violence has not been at the center of our grantmaking efforts, The Endowment has provided grants to address this issue. Thus, the CommunitiesFirst program approach has proven to be an effective means of helping communities at the local level deal with youth violence and other pressing issues.

COMMUNITIESFIRST, AN OVERVIEW

The CommunitiesFirst program is a responsive and flexible grant program designed to stimulate innovative thinking from communities in addressing persistent and/or emerging health issues. Not only do communities possess the leadership, creativity, and knowledge to identify needs and develop solutions, they often see opportunities and challenges that we do not. Thus, the program is grounded in two fundamental beliefs:

- (1) that the community plays a central role in promoting health; and
- (2) that inclusion, partnership and community ownership, with a focus on local assets and resources, are critical to successfully addressing local issues.

The program purposefully provides flexibility to communities to develop and explore new ideas and strategies, test models, and build partnerships to improve the health and well being of underserved individuals, families, and communities. However, any grant provided through CommunitiesFirst program must support one or more of the following broad objectives:

- *Access:* To improve access to comprehensive, coordinated, and affordable health services by supporting approaches that bring together the needs of underserved communities with existing public and private resources.
- *Health & Well-Being:* To develop and/or replicate programs that promote healthy behaviors, manage and prevent chronic conditions and injuries, reduce the impact of communicable disease, address behavioral risk factors or protect against environmental threats.
- *Multicultural Health:* To promote culturally specific approaches that reduce cultural and ethnic disparities in health.

Not-for-profit, community-based organizations from throughout California are eligible to apply for funding through this program. There are no deadlines or formal funding cycles, and applications are received and reviewed throughout the year. The Endowment does not set budget limits on its programs, and multi-year funding requests are accepted. The application consists of (1) a cover sheet; (2) a project proposal narrative – no more than 10 pages – which includes background information on the issue to be addressed, explanation of program approach and strategies, anticipated outcomes, and organization qualifications to conduct this project or program; (3) line-item budget of the project; and (4) a copy of the Internal Revenue Service determination letter demonstrating tax-exempt status.

The Endowment staff invests considerable time in reviewing grant applications. In many instances, the program officer works actively with potential grantees to get a better understanding of the project, offers advice on how to strengthen the proposal, and visits the organization. The review process is not competitive, in that applicants do not compete against one another for a limited pool of money. Instead, Endowment staff focuses on each application separately and evaluates each project on its own merits. Each proposal is reviewed for the following criteria:

- Relevant to one of The Endowment's mission and objectives;
- Benefits underserved individuals and communities;
- Addresses persistent and/or emerging health challenges;
- Provides creative approaches to serving the target population;
- Demonstrates understanding of the issues affecting the target population, and more importantly, the capability to serve the population;
- Builds partnerships and encourages collaboration with other community groups and organizations that are working to help the target population;
- Demonstrates cultural competency in program approach, and organizational capacity to conduct the program; and
- Reasonableness of the budget request based on the program goals, terms of the program, and resources needed to accomplish the goal of the program.

In order to determine if the proposal meets the above-mentioned criteria, The Endowment staff conducts an initial review of the project. An internal peer review process of program officers and other staff is then done to provide analysis and recommendations for funding. If the proposal is recommended for funding, it is then forwarded to The Endowment's management team for review and ultimately, sent to the Chief Executive Officer for his review and final decision. For grants over \$1 million, The Endowment's Board of Directors must approve the request.

GRANT PROGRESS

Between March 1, 1999, and February 29, 2000, The California Endowment awarded 190 grants totaling approximately \$74 million to organizations throughout California through the CommunitiesFirst program. The average grant award was approximately \$344,000, with the average award term being just over 2 years.

These grants addressed a wide range of issues, including access to health coverage and health care, substance abuse, mental health, homelessness, disabilities, organizational infrastructure and development, primary care, domestic violence, and chronic diseases. Approximately 21% of CommunitiesFirst grants primarily served youth between the ages of 13-23 years, while 15% of grants served children between the ages of 0-12 years.

The Endowment funded a number of different approaches and strategies to address the above mentioned issues. This included expansion of existing programs into other communities, capacity building of organizations, community organizing, capital projects, direct services, and providing health information and training to community members.

Grant funds were distributed to organizations across California, with 26% of CommunitiesFirst funds serving Los Angeles County, 17% of funds serving the Bay Area, 16% of funds serving San Diego/San Bernardino region, 19% of funds serving the Sacramento and Northern Counties (Yuba, Mendocino, etc.) area, 10% of funds serving the Central Valley and Central Coast, and 10% of funds utilized on a statewide basis.

EXAMPLES OF GRANTS

The California Endowment has, to a limited extent, provided grants to address youth violence issues. The following are examples of these grants.

➤ **The Mentoring Center (Oakland)**

African American Males Transition Program, Positive Minds Program, and African American Highly At-Risk Youth Transition Program

A two-year, \$107,500 grant was awarded to The Mentoring Center in February 1998, to support and implement two culturally appropriate mentoring programs, the African American Males Transition Program (AAMTP) and the Positive Minds Program (PMP).

The AAMTP targets African American incarcerated youth between the ages of 17-22 years. The model includes a combination of individual and group mentoring and a 20-week series of educational workshops that focus on uncovering the attitudes and behaviors that gave rise to anti-self, anti-community actions and with the support of mentors, create healthy life-style alternatives. A core ingredient of the curriculum is the cultural and historical components, which provides the youth with a new and positive set of ideas about who they are, and their role in their community. The most powerful aspect of the curriculum concept is that five presenters who represent five generations of African Americans deliver it. Youth receive individual attention and support to attain their personal educational and employment goals. Mentoring Center staff works with family members and probation officers to provide the necessary support for youth to complete their goals and when necessary, mediate between family members or refer families in need of therapy to community resources.

The PMP operates in the same format as AAMTP except that it serves youth released from prison and is open to youth that are at high risk of incarceration and in need of guidance and support. PMP offers weekly forums that provide a safe place for youth to discuss personal concerns, receive support and advice regarding pressing personal, family, academic and community issues.

The program has proven to be very successful. Of the 82 incarcerated youth served in AAMTP, 29 have been released. Of the 29, 18 remain in the PMP program. Thirteen have completed their high school diploma; 9 work full or part-time jobs; 8 are enrolled in community college; 1 has transferred to a four year university; 6 provide workshops and/or “community talks” to other at-risk youth at juvenile halls, schools and neighborhood groups; and 3 have won youth wards or have been cited for their community service.

Because of the program’s success, The Endowment recently awarded a two-year, \$254,334 grant to expand the program to serve incarcerated young women, to complete a second phase evaluation that will track youth in the program over a two-year period, and to replicate the model in one to two other ethnic communities in California.

➤ **Project Sister Sexual Assault Crisis & Prevention Services (Pomona)**

Juvenile Delinquency and Violence Intervention Program

A three-year, \$322,584 grant was awarded in March 2000 to Project Sister Sexual Assault Crisis & Prevention Services to provide violence prevention and intervention services to high-risk students in the Pomona Unified School District in Los Angeles County.

The City of Pomona has one of the highest rates of poverty and crime in the San Gabriel Valley. Youth exhibiting the most risk for delinquency are served through the Pomona Alternative School (PAS), a component of the Pomona Unified School District that provides alternative learning situations for approximately 1000 such students. Academically, 90% of the students at PAS are below grade level, and 75% are currently in the LA County Probation System. In addition, PAS student body statistics show that 87% of the students have been victims of physical or sexual crime, do not live (or may have never lived) with their father, and live in violent home settings.

Unfortunately, current services provided to PAS students were inconsistent and lacked sufficient coordination with other social service agencies. Most of the services were done on an ad-hoc basis, which led to limited success in helping these troubled youth. The Endowment's grant now allows Project Sister to partner with the Pomona Alternative School to provide a more integrated and systemic approach to address family and social violence experienced by these students. The program includes the following components: (1) psychoeducational group exposure that will include programming on anger management, assertiveness training, choices and decision-making, sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence, and alternatives to violence; (2) focused support groups with the tools to identify and utilize specific nonviolent behavioral interventions and alternatives; and (3) parent workshops that focus on gaining and maintaining parental control, enhancing their communication skills, identifying stress, and reducing and identifying alternatives to family violence.

➤ **Fresno Interfaith Sponsoring Committee, Inc.**

Fresno Youth Gang Violence Prevention Project

A two-year, \$120,000 grant was awarded to the Fresno Interfaith Sponsoring Committee, Inc., in May, 1998, to support a collaborative effort of youth, parents, church and school leaders to identify causes of youth gang violence, explore solutions, and provide needed prevention and intervention services to middle and elementary school children.

The project's target area of South Fresno had the highest rate of gang-related crime in the City and County of Fresno. Teen pregnancy, substance abuse, AIDS, and homicides are among the greatest public health threats to youth, particularly Latinos, in the Fresno area.

Community members sought to provide early gang intervention activities to elementary and middle school children. Grant funding allowed the Fresno Interfaith Sponsoring Committee to expand community-organizing committees to work through targeted neighborhood schools on youth gang prevention and other activities. This included the expansion of after-school, homework centers at middle and elementary schools; recruitment of parent and neighborhood volunteers to serve as tutors and mentors to students; and coordination of drug and violence prevention workshops.

Thus far, the Sponsoring Committee has been able to establish after-school, homework centers at over 20 schools (middle and elementary) throughout the Fresno area. Each center serves approximately 70 children on a daily basis. The community has given a significant amount of support to the centers by providing volunteer assistance. The local school district has been able to leverage state funding to help operate the homework centers. Most importantly, the community feels that the amount of youth violence has decreased. The Committee is planning to conduct a formal evaluation of the program to determine how much crime has reduced, the program's impact on each student's educational progress, etc.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Comprehensive, sustained service delivery to at-risk students must be incorporated at the school level. School districts typically are unable to devote the necessary resources to provide ongoing, case-management services, and after-school activities to their students. While in school, troubled youth receive limited social services to help address behavioral problems, which leads to violence and other health threats.
2. Jurisdictional and parochial issues among government agencies remain a problem. One of our grantees reported that the local city government was reluctant to provide funds to help support homework centers and after-school activities because they felt it was the school district's responsibility to provide the necessary resources.
3. Parents play a critical role in the issue of youth violence. With more parents working longer hours, children are spending less quality time with parents. Lack of parental supervision during the after-school hours has helped lead to more children engaging in delinquent behavior. The increasing amount of single-parent families has led to a loss of positive male or female role models for youth. In some instances, it is violence at home that leads to children developing a negative mentality. Many parents do not have the communication and other skills needed to effectively assist their children. More importantly, the mentality and behavior of the parent is at times just as bad or worse than the child. As a result, it is important to begin examining how to best help parents of troubled youth.
4. Environmental factors influence the type of behavior a child will exhibit. If children are raised in a community where certain problematic behavior is deemed acceptable, it becomes more likely that that child will follow similar patterns of behavior. Furthermore, if the quality of instruction, advice, and examples that a child receives are destructive and unhealthy, it is safe to assume that the child's mentality and behavior will follow suit.
5. A "one size fits all approach" does not work. Although a intervention/prevention program may be successful for one group, it does not necessarily ensure that it can be applied to all groups. For example, the issues and needs of youth in juvenile hall are different than those youth who are just beginning to get into trouble. Programs must adapt or be modified in such a way to address the particular problems of a particular age group, ethnic group, etc.